



C O N N E C T I C U T

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Legislative Leaders Announce Bi-Partisan Round Table on Hospitals and Health Care

Hartford - Legislative leaders today announced the formation of a bi-partisan Round Table on Hospitals and Health Care. The goal of the round table is to reach out to policy makers, hospitals, physicians, hospital and health facility employees and staff, patient advocates, health insurers, local officials and other stakeholders to monitor the implementation of recent legislation, discuss the rapid changes in the health care market and develop policy recommendations to help ensure continued access to affordable quality care in Connecticut. The first meeting will take place on Thursday October 9 at 3:00 pm in the Legislative Office Building.

The round table will be bipartisan and include the following legislative leaders, or their designees: the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the House, House Majority Leader, Senate Minority Leader, House Minority Leader, and two additional members of the minority caucuses appointed by their leaders.

This year the legislature passed Public Act No. 14-168, which imposed strict new financial reporting requirements and increased regulatory oversight. It requires any new for-profit hospital to provide continued access to high quality affordable care and authorizes both the Public Health Commissioner and Attorney General to impose conditions upon any new hospital owner to guarantee those commitments. It also ensures greater oversight of large physician practice acquisitions by hospitals and other entities by requiring the purchaser to obtain a Certificate of Need (CON) from the Office of Health Care Access.

Senator Martin M. Looney (D-New Haven), Majority Leader, stated, "This year's legislation was a response to the intense financial pressure some of our non-profit hospitals are facing and the very real threat that these hospitals might close, leaving tens of thousands without access to local care and thousands without their jobs. However, it was merely a first step and by no means the last word. We have an ongoing responsibility to our communities, citizens and workers to respond to these changes, monitor their impact and develop appropriate regulatory policies which ensure transparency and accountability."

Senator Len Fasano (R-North Haven), Minority Leader Pro Tempore, whose father was a doctor in New Haven, has expressed concern about the rapid consolidation of physician practices under the Yale New Haven Health Services umbrella. He noted that whether it is the exorbitant "facility fees" charged by hospitals after they take over previously independent practices or the fact that patients can no longer find independent doctors in certain specialty areas, it is clear that these market changes have a tremendous impact on costs and patient choice.

There are also questions about how hospital policy may impact physician autonomy and decision making and the physician-patient relationship.

"With the recently announced merger of PriMed physicians with Yale New Haven Health Services, Yale's consolidation of the market has been further extended geographically and numerically. As policy makers, we must understand the implications of these moves and work to protect the interests of our constituents," Sen. Fasano said.

"With the health care delivery system changing at lightning speed across Connecticut and the nation, it is critical that we bring together stakeholders to chart Connecticut's course," said Senate President Donald E. Williams, Jr (D-Brooklyn). "My top priorities are protecting the quality of patient care, employee rights and physician autonomy."

"We took major steps this year to enhance transparency and oversight of hospital conversions and physician practice mergers," said Speaker of the House Brendan Sharkey (D-Hamden). "It is important for the legislature to continue to take an active role in monitoring the evolving health care landscape to help ensure access to quality affordable services."

"This year's legislation was a much needed first step to protect consumers, healthcare workers and our communities," said Majority Leader Joe Aresimowicz (D-Berlin/Southington). "Through this task force, we are continuing the work of ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, quality healthcare."

"The mergers of our health care facilities and the conversion of hospitals to for-profit status are likely going to accelerate in Connecticut as the industry adapts to the new fiscal realities and changing regulations," said House Republican Leader Larry Cafero (R-Norwalk). "This working group is a first legislative step forward, but our goal should be to work collaboratively to ensure that our hospitals can deliver the best, most efficient health care possible."

"Connecticut's healthcare landscape is changing and evolving. It is extremely important to make sure these changes foster better, more affordable healthcare and reduce the barriers that interfere with accessible care," said Senate Minority Leader John McKinney (R-Fairfield). "This year's legislation was an incredible, collaborative accomplishment - but it is only the beginning. Lawmakers and care providers must continue the dialogue, and this round table is the perfect forum to do so."

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